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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 43 of Security Council resolution 2211 (2015). It covers major developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since my report of 24 December 2015 (S/2015/1031), including with regard to the situation on the ground, progress made by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the implementation of its commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, the electoral process and progress made by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in the implementation of its mandate. The report also includes an update on progress in the strategic dialogue between MONUSCO and the Government and the joint development of an exit strategy for MONUSCO.

II. Major developments

A. Political situation

2. The electoral impasse persisted with mistrust deepening around the proposal by President Joseph Kabila to hold a national dialogue in order to address the stalled process. Political parties that are members of the presidential majority continued to support the national dialogue process. On 28 December 2015, in Kinshasa, the spokesperson for the Parti lumumbiste unifié (PALU), a member party of the presidential majority, stated at a press conference that PALU was in "full support" of the national dialogue, as it would help resolve issues linked to the electoral process. On 4 January 2016, in Kinshasa, during a march commemorating martyrs of the liberation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Henri Mova Sakanyi, the leader of the Parti du peuple pour la reconstruction et la démocratie, the dominant political party in the presidential majority, called on all national stakeholders to support and participate in the national dialogue proposed by President Kabila.

3. Opposition parties continued to voice concern that the national dialogue could be used by the Government to prolong the stay of the President in office beyond

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November 2016 or lead to a change in the Constitution to abolish the two-term presidential limit. The Front citoyen 2016, an opposition coalition that was established on 30 December 2015 bringing together civil society organizations, citizen groups and the main opposition parties and platforms, including G7 (a group of seven dissident political parties) and the Dynamique de l'opposition, announced that it would reject participation in the national dialogue, called for respect of the Constitution and opposed any slippage in the electoral calendar and a third term in office for President Kabila. As mentioned in my last report, the President of the Union pour la démocratie et le progrès social (UDPS), Etienne Tshisekedi, called for the appointment of an international facilitator as a condition for UDPS to participate in the dialogue. He reiterated his request in a communiqué issued on 31 December.

4. In that increasingly polarized political context, both the opposition and the presidential majority, each supported by a segment of civil society, announced a series of demonstrations in February 2016. On 8 January, the Dynamique de l'opposition announced a timetable for organizing a series of peaceful demonstrations between January and March to support the holding of transparent and credible elections and to protest against any slippage in the electoral calendar or attempt to change the Constitution.

5. On 14 January 2016, the African Union issued a statement that conveyed the support of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, for President Kabila's initiative to hold a national dialogue. The statement announced the appointment of former Prime Minister of Togo and member of the African Union Panel of the Wise, Edem Kodjo, to hold consultations in Kinshasa for the launching of the dialogue. In a joint statement issued on 18 January in response, the opposition platforms G7 and the Dynamique de l'opposition noted that the communiqué of the African Union had failed to reflect the actual situation on the ground and regretted that it had not made any reference to respect for the Constitution and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. On the same day, UDPS underlined the need to hold a national dialogue to prevent President Kabila from running for a third term. On 20 January, the Government issued a statement welcoming the position of the African Union and the mission of Mr. Kodjo. In the same statement, the Minister of Information and spokesperson for the Government, Lambert Mende, noted the "encouragement and support" of the African Union, the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo and the United Nations for "promoting the holding of a national dialogue" that would foster an environment conducive to peaceful and transparent elections.

6. The African Union envoy undertook initial consultations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 19 to 22 January 2016. He met with President Kabila on 19 January, following which he held three days of consultations with national stakeholders. While G7 and Dynamique de l'opposition platforms, along with the Front citoyen 2016, declined invitations to meet with him, Eve Bazaiba, from the Mouvement de libération du Congo, a member party of the Dynamique de l'opposition, met with the envoy. She reportedly reiterated the position of the platform against the holding of the national dialogue, highlighting the risk that it would be used to circumvent the Constitution and prolong the stay of President Kabila in power beyond 2016.

7. On 4 February 2016, Mr. Kodjo met with UDPS President, Etienne Tshisekedi in Brussels in an effort to encourage him to commit to the launching of the national dialogue. Following the meeting, Mr. Tshisekedi issued a communiqué stating that

UDPS was adhering to the Constitution and was committed to a "democratic alternative to power in 2016", while rejecting a dialogue that had been unilaterally planned by President Kabila. On 6 February, Mr. Kodjo returned to Kinshasa for another round of consultations with the Government, political parties and other actors.

8. On 16 February 2016, the African Union, the European Union, the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie and the United Nations issued a joint communiqué urging all Congolese political actors to spare no effort, within the framework of the country's Constitution, to ensure the successful holding of elections, preserve peace and deepen democracy, including through a political process. The communiqué recalled that the decision by the African Union to appoint Mr. Kodjo as Special Envoy and that his efforts on the ground fell within the framework of the relevant instruments of the African Union, including the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. The communiqué also stressed the importance of dialogue and urged all Congolese political actors to extend their full cooperation to the African Union envoy. In response, G7 indicated in a statement issued on 20 February its readiness to participate in direct negotiations among political actors rather than in the dialogue proposed by President Kabila. G7 also called on the four organizations that had co-signed the communiqué to do everything possible to ensure that President Kabila would respect the Constitution. Furthermore, G7, while welcoming the mention of the African Union Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, regretted that the communiqué had failed to mention the "massive human rights violations and restrictions on individual and public freedoms" in the country. On 21 February, the Secretary-General of the presidential majority and Speaker of the National Assembly, Aubin Minaku, expressed regret at the refusal by the opposition to take part in the national dialogue and indicated that the proposal by G7 (in its 20 February statement) to appoint an interim President if presidential elections were postponed beyond November 2016 would violate the Constitution. On 22 February, media reports indicated that Toussaint Tshilombo, former Minister of Information and senior member of the Parti du peuple pour la reconstruction et la démocratie, had said that the 16 January joint communiqué had mentioned the "timely" holding of elections and not adherence to constitutional timeframes.

9. As foreshadowed in the timetable announced by the Dynamique de l'opposition coalition for a series of peaceful demonstrations (see para. 4 above), the opposition staged a "ville morte" protest on 16 February 2016, which was observed mainly in Bukavu, Goma, Kinshasa, Moba and Uvira, and to a lesser extent in Lubumbashi and Mbuji-Mayi. In Kinshasa, police were stationed at major intersections, while some shops were closed or opened later in the morning. No major incidents were reported. Assessments of the outcome were polarized: the presidential majority characterized it as a "resounding failure", while opposition parties declared it a success and urged President Kabila to draw appropriate conclusions from the "widespread mobilization".

10. MONUSCO registered over 45 arrests of individuals in Goma, Kinshasa, Lubumbashi and Uvira in relation to the protest. Many of those arrested were civil society activists or opposition members, including a member of Parliament, Martin Fayulu, who was temporarily detained ahead of the "ville morte" protest on 14 February. While the majority of those arrested were subsequently released without charges, including Martin Fayulu, the trial of six members of the Lutte pour le changement movement before a magistrates' court in Goma commenced on

18 February. On 24 February, each was sentenced to two years in prison. On 5 March, an appellate court in Goma reduced each sentence to six months.

11. During my visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, from 23 to 24 February 2016, I met with President Kabila, his Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and with representatives of political parties in the ruling coalition, the opposition and civil society. I encouraged all parties to pursue dialogue and exercise restraint in addressing the challenges related to the electoral process, with a view to upholding the principles enshrined in the Constitution.

12. Throughout the period under review, my Special Representative continued to use his good offices to promote political dialogue among political actors across the spectrum and representatives of civil society, encouraging stakeholders to reach a consensus to overcome the impasse on elections. He also urged all parties to resolve their differences through peaceful means and to avoid violence.

13. My Special Representative further intensified his engagement with President Kabila, who indicated his readiness to enhance cooperation with MONUSCO and to re-engage in discussions on the joint development of an exit strategy for MONUSCO. Two meetings on that matter took place between the MONUSCO leadership and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Raymond Tshibanda. On 11 January 2016, President Kabila authorized the resumption of cooperation between the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) and MONUSCO in operations against armed groups. On 28 January, MONUSCO and the Government signed a technical arrangement outlining the modalities of that cooperation, and on 23 February FARDC command issued an operational order to implement the arrangement and resume MONUSCO-supported neutralization operations.

14. The Government continued its efforts towards implementation of its national commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. On 31 December 2015, President Kabila signed two presidential decrees, pardoning nine members of the political-religious movement Bundu Dia Kongo who were serving life sentences, as well as all prisoners, foreign and Congolese alike, of 70 years of age or older who were not serving sentences for violent crimes. On 5 January 2016, the Minister of Justice, Alexis Thambwe, announced that 1,200 low-level offenders who had served at least one quarter of their sentences would be released, indicating that that decision and the presidential decrees were aimed at easing the political situation ahead of the national dialogue. With regard to decentralization, some measures were taken by the Government to implement the 9 December 2015 decree defining the responsibilities of the special commissioners appointed in November to administer the 21 new provinces until provincial and gubernatorial elections were held. The implementing directives accompanying the decree were issued to the commissioners on 7 January 2016. Finally, in the area of security sector reform, the draft Programmatic Law on the Armed Forces that had been pending since 2013 was reviewed by an interministerial committee and President Kabila.

15. MONUSCO continued to support the implementation of the national commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. Through international coordination mechanisms, MONUSCO continued its efforts to promote coherence in the provision of assistance to the Government on security sector reform by international partners. Some progress was achieved in strengthening the logistics capacity of FARDC. However, additional funds need to be allocated by the Government to support and sustain FARDC operations.

B. Preparation for elections

16. The National Independent Electoral Commission continued to experience difficulties with electoral preparations, resulting in continued delays. According to its president, Corneille Nangaa, the main constraints were the need to amend the legislative framework, the pending disbursement of funds by the Government and an outstanding political decision on options for a partial or full revision of the voters' registry.

17. On 10 January 2016, the president of the Commission indicated in the media that the Commission was working on a revised electoral calendar and that the projected timeline would likely extend beyond the constitutional timeframe for the presidential election. On 14 January, the G7 platform held a press conference, condemning the statement as "playing into the hands of the presidential majority and intentionally violating the Constitution". The platform proposed a calendar for holding provincial, legislative and presidential elections simultaneously during the last quarter of 2016 to ensure that the constitutional time frame would be respected. G7 also called on the Government to assume its responsibilities for resolving obstacles preventing the Commission from moving forward with the organization of elections.

18. On 2 February 2016, the Prime Minister, Matata Ponyo, announced that $22 million had been disbursed to the Commission, which was followed by a second disbursement of $20 million on 18 February. On 10 February, the Commission announced the launch of an invitation to tender for the acquisition of equipment and services for the updating of the voters' registry and the publication of a calendar for the indirect election of governors and deputy governors of the 21 new provinces, to be held on 26 March.

19. On 28 January, in a meeting with international partners, the Commission announced its decision to undertake a complete revision of the voters' registry, initially projected to take about 16 months. Some partners expressed concern about the timeline. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, Evariste Boshab, confirmed that the Government had committed to disbursing $300 million to the Commission for electoral preparations. A number of donors indicated their readiness to support the revision of the voters' registry, provided that an agreed electoral calendar and a disbursement plan for Government funds to the Commission were in place.

20. As mentioned in my last report (S/2015/1031), the Commission requested MONUSCO to provide logistical support for the updating of the voters' registry. Further to that request, my Special Representative met with the President of the Commission on 11 January 2016 and with the Vice-President of the Commission, Norbert Katintima, on 26 January to discuss preliminary plans for revising the voters' registry.

21. The multi-partner basket fund for the Projet d'appui au cycle électoral au Congo, managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), remained funded at only around 6 per cent of the estimated budget of $123.3 million to support the electoral process.

C. Security situation

22. The security situation remained volatile in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, and deteriorated in parts of North Kivu and Ituri provinces. The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the Forces démocratiques pour la libération du Rwanda (FDLR), the Union des patriotes pour la défense des innocents and other Mayi-Mayi groups remained active in Beni and Lubero territories (North Kivu), as did the Forces de résistance patriotiques de l'Ituri (FRPI) in Irumu territory and Mayi-Mayi Simba in Mambasa territory (Ituri), constituting a significant threat to civilians.

23. In North Kivu, FARDC focused its efforts on neutralizing ADF through its Sukola I operation. Although weakened, ADF continued its brutal attacks against civilians, FARDC and MONUSCO. Since 24 December 2015, suspected ADF and affiliated elements have staged at least 22 attacks, killing 26 civilians and 18 FARDC soldiers. A serious incident involving suspected ADF elements occurred on 24 December when five civilians were killed in Vemba, east of Mavivi, with another attack on 5 January 2016 in Nyaleke, east of Beni, resulting in the killing of an additional five civilians. On the same day, suspected ADF elements ambushed FARDC soldiers along the Mbau-Kamango road, killing two soldiers and wounding three others. On 13 January, the FARDC position at Opira, south of Eringeti, was attacked by suspected ADF elements, killing six FARDC soldiers, prompting FARDC and MONUSCO to increase patrolling in the area.

24. MONUSCO supported FARDC operations by targeting ADF positions with attack helicopters and artillery on several occasions, resulting in a yet-to-be determined number of ADF casualties. Specific targets were identified by unmanned aerial surveillance systems and in coordination with FARDC. Suspected ADF elements and other armed elements affiliated with the group fired at MONUSCO helicopters in Beni territory on 11 and 16 January 2016. Although the helicopters were struck by gunfire on both occasions, there was no damage or injury reported.

25. The FARDC Sukola II operation against FDLR continued in North and South Kivu provinces without support from MONUSCO. In North Kivu, operations continued to be conducted in the Nyanzale and Tongo areas, in Rutshuru territory, with new operations also launched in southern Lubero and eastern Walikale territories. The thrust of the new operations added to increased tensions between the Hutu and Nande communities, fuelled by a series of attacks by a newly emerging coalition of local Mayi-Mayi groups, which was perceived as supporting the Nande community, on FDLR positions in and around Buleusa and Lusamambo. There were also FDLR counter-attacks in an attempt to regain ground lost to the FARDC and Mayi-Mayi coalitions. On 30 and 31 December 2015, suspected FDLR elements attacked the villages of Bukumbirwa, Buyamusha and Tusala, west of Buleusa, and looted and burned a large number of homes, resulting in a spate of retaliatory killings on both sides, abductions, the mass displacement of civilians and the burning of hundreds of houses. The violence has resulted in the displacement of some 75,000 persons since October 2015. The most serious incident occurred on 7 January 2016, when suspected FDLR elements attacked the village of Miriki, in Lubero territory, killing 16 civilians from the Nande community. Following the attack, tensions between the Hutu and Nande communities in and around the village increased. North Kivu authorities deployed additional officers of the Congolese National Police and FARDC soldiers to the Buleusa and Lusamabo areas in an attempt to facilitate the return of some civilians who had fled the violence.

26. In South Kivu, Sukola II operations continued in Kabare, Kalehe, Mwenga and Shabunda territories, although there were reports that FDLR had returned to parts of Mwenga territory, especially to areas from which FARDC had withdrawn. FARDC continued operations against Mayi-Mayi Raiya-Mutomboki factions in Mwenga and Shabunda territories and Mayi-Mayi Yakutumba in Fizi territory, triggering the surrender of 332 Mayi-Mayi Raiya Mutomboki and Mayi-Mayi Yakutumba elements. MONUSCO received unconfirmed reports of infiltration by armed elements from Burundi and Rwanda, mainly into Uvira territory. FARDC and MONUSCO continued to conduct patrols in the border area between South Kivu and Burundi.

27. In Ituri province, military operations against FRPI continued with the joint FARDC-MONUSCO operation "Clean Sweep" to dismantle FRPI camps in areas northwest of Aveba. FARDC moved a battalion to the region from Kisangani to reinforce its positions. However, suspected FRPI elements continued to pose a serious threat to civilians by conducting violent looting raids and abductions in South Irumu territory. In Mambasa territory, Mayi-Mayi groups continued to attack civilians and loot their property, mainly around mining sites and markets, resulting in the killing of 17 civilians, the wounding of 8 and the rape of 1 woman between 24 December 2015 and 18 February 2016. In addition, relations between the Bila and Nande communities remained strained following the abduction and assassination of a Bila traditional chief by suspected Nande assailants on 13 January. In January, MONUSCO and provincial authorities started a community dialogue programme to prevent the escalation of ethnic tensions in Irumu and Mambasa territories.

28. Tensions and violence re-emerged between the Hema and Lendu communities over issues related to access to land and cattle theft in Irumu territory, resulting in the killing of four members of the Lendu community in December 2015 in the Lagabo area, and one on 26 January 2016 in Tshabo. In addition to sensitization efforts by provincial authorities, MONUSCO engaged with representatives of both communities in Lagabo to advocate for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

29. Between 150 and 200 elements of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), mainly from the Central African Republic remained in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo as a result of pressure from the African Union Regional Task Force in the Central African Republic. They continued attacks on civilians, including ambushes, lootings and abductions in Ango and Bondo territories in Bas-Uélé province. During the period under review, LRA also abducted 24 persons, mostly for use as porters; 15 of those abducted later escaped. Acts of banditry by unidentified armed elements believed to be Congolese using the modus operandi of LRA and poaching by LRA elements continued in Bas-Uélé and Haut-Uélé provinces. MONUSCO supported FARDC-led operations against residual LRA elements, including by establishing three mobile operating bases in Bangadi, Duru and Faradje, in Haut-Uélé, from 23 December 2015 to 15 January 2016. Together with FARDC troops and the African Union Regional Task Force, the operations focused on gathering intelligence on LRA positions.

30. In Tanganyika province, in South Kivu, Mayi-Mayi elements affiliated with the Yakutumba group launched repeated attacks on the FARDC navy base near Kabimba on the shores of Lake Tanganyika. Although they did not gain control of the base, their presence remained a threat to the local population. Mayi-Mayi Kata-Katanga

also continued to pose a threat to the civilian population in Manono and Moba territories, particularly in areas where FARDC had a limited presence.

Protection of civilians and neutralization of armed groups

31. MONUSCO continued to focus on efforts to protect civilians, including through the neutralization of armed groups in areas of concern. The Mission also continued to carry out some military activities with FARDC, with a particular focus on operations against ADF in the Beni area and FRPI in Ituri province. Four joint MONUSCO assessment missions and two joint protection team missions were carried out to those areas with a view to updating plans and enhancing the protection of civilians under threat. The MONUSCO force conducted day and night patrols and mobile deployments and rehearsed quick air deployments of the rapidly deployable battalions.

32. In Beni territory, the MONUSCO force intervention brigade redeployed one company operating base to enhance security in the town of Erigenti following earlier ADF attacks. MONUSCO police pursued the implementation of its joint strategy with the national police to enhance security in the town of Beni. Joint patrols and training of national police officers contributed to the stabilization of Beni and prevented killings, looting and targeted attacks.

33. Following the suspected FDLR attack on the village of Miriki on 7 January 2016 in Lubero territory, where clashes between FDLR and Mayi-Mayi groups exacerbated ethnic tensions, MONUSCO swiftly reinforced the Miriki company operating base and deployed civilian staff to enhance its protection response. In response to advocacy by MONUSCO, the national authorities redeployed 45 national police officers and reinforced FARDC in the area. MONUSCO also supported the police in securing nearby camps for internally displaced persons and refugees. Threats of retaliatory attacks on a camp of Hutu internally displaced persons sheltered near the company operating base in Miriki were averted through the joint efforts of the Congolese authorities, humanitarian actors and MONUSCO.

34. National, provincial and traditional authorities in Miriki undertook initiatives with MONUSCO support to promote dialogue and reconciliation in southern Lubero territory. In Rutshuru territory, MONUSCO facilitated dialogue among ethnic communities and supported the establishment of a traditional peace committee to improve inter-communal relations. In Kinshasa, MONUSCO met with Hutu and Nande representatives in Parliament to advocate for political action to prevent further violence and find new solutions to neutralizing armed groups in Lubero and surrounding areas.

35. The Community Alert Network system transmitted an average of 190 early warning alerts per month. Ninety per cent of the alerts resulted in a response; the remaining ten per cent received no reply owing to insufficient deployment of FARDC and Congolese police, lack of logistical means available to Congolese security forces, insufficient coordination between MONUSCO and FARDC against ADF and FDLR, and suspects fleeing before response teams arrived.

36. The United Nations Mine Action Service continued to support the efforts of MONUSCO to protect civilians, destroying 75 explosive remnants of war, 214 weapons, 1,537 munitions and 170,233 small arms ammunition items for FARDC. An adequate explosive hazard management capacity will remain important.

D. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration/disarmament, demobilization repatriation, resettlement and reintegration

37. Further progress was made in the implementation of Phase III of the Programme national de désarmement, démobilisation et réintegration (PNDDR), even though the Government had not disbursed additional funding for the programme since November 2015. The Unité d'exécution du PNDDR demobilized 575 combatants during the period under review, bringing the total number of former combatants demobilized since the inception of the programme in May 2015 to 5,330. On 22 January 2016, MONUSCO resumed the provision of food and non-food items to Phase II of PNDDR, which it had suspended since 20 September 2015.

38. Clashes erupted on 24 February 2016 between FDLR ex-combatants and FARDC in the Government-run Kitona camp over allegations of the killing of an ex-combatant. The incident reportedly resulted in the killing of at least seven people. The MONUSCO-funded re-insertion centre also suffered considerable damage.

39. Construction continued on two re-insertion preparation centres in Kamina and Kitona, funded by MONUSCO, with construction completed on 29 January 2016 in Kitona. Some 2,660 former combatants in Kamina and 1,546 in Kitona are taking vocational training courses, which are expected to end on 31 March. The World Bank trust fund to support the reintegration phase became operational, and contributions have reached $26 million. At the same time, there were reports that FARDC had recruited 301 former combatants from the Kitona camp and another 280 from Kamina camp into its ranks.

40. MONUSCO continued to provide food, medicine and fuel to support 1,348 former FDLR combatants and their dependants in transit camps at Kanyabayonga (North Kivu) and Walungu (South Kivu), as well as in the Government-run camp at Kisangani (Tshopo).

E. Consolidation of State authority and stabilization

41. The Government through its Stabilization and Reconstruction Plan for Areas Emerging from Armed Conflict (STAREC) programme, with support from MONUSCO, began to prepare new stabilization initiatives to be funded in 2016 from the newly established Stabilization Coherence Trust Fund, which was set up through funding commitments of the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. These initiatives aim to implement provincial stabilization strategies and plans, with a focus on enhancing community dialogue with State representatives, strengthening security and State authority, providing economic recovery activities for vulnerable populations and addressing other conflict-related grievances.

F. Human rights situation

42. The human rights situation continued to be a source of serious concern during the reporting period. MONUSCO identified a trend towards increasingly restricted political space with increasing violations of the right to freedom of opinion, expression and peaceful assembly. The Mission continued to document violations,

including arbitrary arrests and harassment of civil society activists, media professionals and leading members of opposition parties, as well as the disruption of some opposition meetings and demonstrations or the refusal by Government officials to permit such activities. Most of those violations were committed without investigation or other corrective measures being taken by the national authorities. The national police and the Agence nationale de renseignements were allegedly responsible for perpetrating the majority of the reported violations. Since my last report, at least seven demonstrations planned or organized by opposition parties and/or civil society organizations have been violently repressed, dispersed by security forces or banned by local authorities. At least nine demonstrations, five of which were organized by the presidential majority, took place during the same period without interference by the authorities.

43. Armed groups, including ADF, FDLR, FRPI, LRA and Mayi-Mayi, continued to commit serious human rights abuses in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri provinces. During the reporting period ADF combatants were responsible for at least 29 serious human rights violations. FRPI combatants were allegedly responsible for 52 serious human rights violations, FDLR for 25 violations and Nduma défense du Congo (NDC) and Mayi-Mayi Nyatura for 11 and 10 violations, respectively. From 5 to 13 January 2016, MONUSCO deployed a joint verification team to the Kayna, Kirumba, Luofu and Miriki areas in North Kivu to investigate allegations of serious crimes perpetrated by some of those groups. The team interviewed over 120 sources and confirmed a total of 162 human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law committed by some of those armed groups between 1 November 2015 and 7 January 2016. The abuses were reportedly committed in the context of ethnically targeted attacks launched in order to gain control over territory.

44. MONUSCO, through its prosecution support cells, continued to provide technical support to military justice authorities undertaking investigations and convening mobile courts in a number of locations in Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu and Tanganyika provinces, for a range of crimes including murder, rape and the recruitment of child soldiers. The Mission also provided support to the civilian justice authorities in investigating and prosecuting grave crimes perpetrated in the eastern provinces. Through the Serious Crime Support Unit of the United Nations Police Division, MONUSCO reinforced the capacity of the national police to investigate the financing of armed groups and their involvement in the trafficking of natural resources. MONUSCO also trained Congolese civilian, police and military staff in prisons in Bunia (Ituri) and Uvira (South Kivu) on prison security and incident management.

45. On 2 January 2016, President Kabila promulgated a law implementing the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Sexual violence

46. Sixty persons were reported to be victims of conflict-related sexual violence, including eight girls and one boy. Armed groups were responsible for 83.3 per cent of those abuses and State actors for 16.6 per cent. MONUSCO continued to investigate allegations of the rape of at least 20 women in Walikale territory between 5 and 12 January 2016. In areas of risk in North Kivu, MONUSCO conducted market patrols with a view to enhancing the protection of women. The

United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict and MONUSCO continued to support the Government in developing a draft law on the protection of victims and witnesses.

Child protection

47. MONUSCO documented 242 cases of grave violation of children's rights, which represented a significant increase compared with the last reporting period, when 199 such cases were documented. A total of 174 children (156 boys and 18 girls) were separated or escaped from armed groups during the period under review, which indicated an increase in the release of children by armed groups in comparison with the previous reporting period. The main armed groups recruiting children were FDLR (49), FRPI (29), Mayi-Mayi Nyatura (29), Mayi-Mayi Rayia Mutomboki (17) and NDC Cheka (13). Fifteen boys formerly associated with armed groups were detained by FARDC (13) and the national police (2) in Ituri and North Kivu, five of whom remain in detention.

48. With the support of MONUSCO and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, the Commandement général des écoles militaires (CGEM) screened new FARDC recruits and found 84 children among them. The children were subsequently separated from FARDC. In January, CGEM requested the FARDC Joint Chiefs of Staff to apply sanctions against members of the recruitment team.

G. Humanitarian situation

49. As I witnessed during my visit to the eastern part of the country on 23 February 2016, the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains a source of serious concern, the result of the activities of armed groups, intercommunal violence, continued displacement and an influx of refugees. Military operations against armed groups also led to population displacement in some areas.

50. Humanitarian access continues to be hampered by insecurity. An increasing number of humanitarian actors were forced to suspend programmes owing to security threats in Irumu territory (Ituri), Beni and Lubero territories (North Kivu) and Shabunda territory (South Kivu), affecting thousands of people in need.

51. During the reporting period, there were 1.5 million internally displaced persons and some 169,000 refugees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Among the refugees, over 100,000 are from the Central African Republic, some 30,000 from Rwanda and approximately 23,000 from Burundi. The dismantling of sites for internally displaced persons in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo by the Government, without sufficient consultation of the humanitarian community, contributed to the further displacement of some of the most vulnerable populations, especially women and children. On 12 January 2016, the closure by the Government of the camp at Mukoto, in Masisi territory in North Kivu, resulted in 4,250 persons being displaced once again. The humanitarian community encouraged the Government to respect its international obligations, including those related to the closure of sites for internally displaced persons.

52. The Humanitarian Response Plan for 2016 has a budget of $690 million and addresses the needs of 6 million people in need of assistance, which represents an increase of 800,000 people as compared with 2015.

H. Economic situation

53. Despite continued macroeconomic stability with an annual inflation rate of around 0.8 per cent, an estimated budget deficit of $1.3 billion for 2016 was announced during a meeting of the Council of Ministers on 22 January 2016. Some reports attributed the announced deficit to the continued fall in the prices of primary export commodities. In an effort to stabilize and stimulate the economy, the Council of Ministers adopted a set of measures on 26 January with a view to promoting greater transparency in extractive industries, streamlining the management of State-owned companies, attracting foreign investments by promoting a better business climate and, encouraging public private partnerships.

I. Regional developments

54. Little progress was made towards the implementation of the Nairobi Declarations of 12 December 2013, including with respect to the repatriation of ex-Mouvement du 23 mars (M23) elements, despite the initiatives of the task force established in December 2015 by the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region on the repatriation of ex-M23 elements.

55. On 14 January 2016, members of the Technical Support Committee of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework met in Nairobi to review developments in the region and progress in the implementation of the Framework. On 28 January, in Addis Ababa, in the margins of the African Union Summit, the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Framework held a meeting at the ministerial level. I have provided detailed information on the objectives and outcomes of those meetings in my report of 9 March 2016 on the implementation of the Framework (S/2016/232).

56. On 11 February 2016, the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United Nations, Ignace Gata Mavita wa Lufuta, wrote to the Security Council expressing concerns about the infiltration of recruited, trained and armed refugees from Rwanda into Burundi through South Kivu and called for respect for the commitments made under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework (S/2016/140). Senior officials of the Government of Rwanda have denied on several occasions any involvement by Rwanda in such activities.

57. On 24 February 2016, I attended the Great Lakes Private Sector Investment Conference hosted by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in Kinshasa, to promote investment in the Great Lakes Region as a means of ensuring durable peace and security.

III. Deployment of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and implementation of its mandate

58. In resolution 2211 (2015), the Security Council endorsed my earlier proposal for a reduction of the authorized strength of MONUSCO by 2,000 troops, which has been completed.

59. As indicated in my report on the future of United Nations peace operations (A/70/357-S/2015/682), I have instructed all missions to communicate to Headquarters any instances of refusal to follow orders given by the Force Commander or the Police Commissioner, whether on grounds of new national caveats or others. The Secretariat will immediately inform the Member State concerned and the Security Council on a regular basis. Where no remedial action is forthcoming, the unit concerned will be repatriated.

Force transformation

60. The effective transformation of the MONUSCO force remains an important objective. This will proceed in parallel with efforts to enhance interoperability between the Framework and force intervention brigades, while continuing efforts to ensure good performance.

61. Capability development will provide the MONUSCO force with the right equipment, training and resources to operate optimally. In that context, the deployment of the first rapidly deployable battalions is under way, and the first deployment of a company took place from 22 to 24 February 2016. Progress was also made towards the implementation and redeployment of the force, which will put troops and assets in the right places in a timely manner to meet current and future threats, as well as minimize inefficiencies. Three bases were closed in North Kivu and Ituri and one opened in another location in North Kivu during that period for an optimal concentration of the Mission's forces against prevailing threats posed by armed groups. Another area of the strategy involves reinforcing the capabilities of FARDC in terms of command and control, planning, logistics and the conduct of operations, with integration of more complex enabling functions such as intelligence and aviation, with a view to supporting FARDC in gradually taking over additional security responsibilities as the MONUSCO force withdraws. That support would be based on a formal request from the Government tailored to each operation.

Multi-phase review

62. A comprehensive and collaborative multi-phase review of MONUSCO commenced in February 2016 with the aim of achieving greater consistency and efficiency in mandate delivery and the use of resources. A team comprising representatives of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support visited MONUSCO from 3 to 9 February to discuss strategic priorities and the overall approach to mandate implementation to be reflected in the revised mission concept, which would be finalized following the adoption of the mandate in March and would inform component-level planning and a Mission structure and staffing review. Further to those consultations, it was agreed that priority would be placed on the political role of MONUSCO to facilitate dialogue among national stakeholders within the framework of the Congolese Constitution

and to support the creation of an environment conducive to the holding of peaceful and credible elections taking into account that sustainable solutions to most of the challenges in the Democratic Republic of the Congo would require addressing the political dimensions of conflict and finding a negotiated political settlement. Discussions with MONUSCO on the protection of civilians and the neutralization of armed groups underscored the need to approach those matters as a mission-wide priority, with an added focus on non-military initiatives, including strong political advocacy, enhanced reporting and effective liaison with communities. MONUSCO has begun developing tailored strategies, including military and non-military initiatives, to address the threat posed by armed groups.

Preparations for elections

63. Preparations by MONUSCO for the electoral process advanced, with the development of a joint mission plan for election security that is based on likely scenarios. That plan includes 18 area-specific security plans and enhanced early warning mechanisms and capacity, with a view to covering situational awareness in the western and central parts of the country, with a focus on preventive action, given the limited deployment of MONUSCO in those areas. That would entail enhanced deterrence and advocacy efforts, human rights monitoring and reporting, and training of the national police to mitigate possible election-related violence. The Mission will continue to keep the plan under review as the electoral process unfolds. MONUSCO is also increasing its internal crisis management capacity in Kinshasa. In addition, the deployment of an additional formed police unit to the capital will be completed by the end of March, while plans to enhance mobility and responsiveness are under development with the redeployment of aviation and armed personnel carriers. The focus of the MONUSCO force will remain on operations in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, although contingency plans envisage a rapid-response capacity. The review by MONUSCO of its configuration, in particular with regard to the police component, in view of increasing law and order challenges in the coming months, concluded that its current police strength was adequate, taking into account the possibility of intermission cooperation arrangements, in particular formed police units, in the event of large-scale violence in areas where MONUSCO is not deployed.

IV. Safety and Security of United Nations personnel

64. MONUSCO determined that its support to FARDC-led operations against armed groups, including FARDC-led operations against ADF in the Grand Nord area of North Kivu, had not led to any discernible increase in threats to United Nations personnel and installations. During the reporting period, there were 60 incidents reported involving United Nations personnel in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Thirty of those incidents were security-related, twenty-eight were accident-related safety incidents and two were related to the detention of national staff. The 30 security incidents included 12 burglaries, 8 thefts, 5 robberies, 3 non-violent public protests, 1 premises intrusion and 1 case of potential hostile surveillance. Seventy-five per cent of the safety incidents were road traffic accidents, while the remaining safety incidents comprised four fires and one flood.

V. Serious misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse

65. MONUSCO continued its efforts to eliminate sexual exploitation and abuse through a robust prevention campaign and more coordinated assistance to victims. My Special Representative promoted awareness of the United Nations standard of conduct and discipline during his visits to MONUSCO offices throughout the country, instructing all personnel on their obligations and calling on managers and commanders to lead by example in enforcing my zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse.

VI. Financial aspects

66. My proposed budget for the maintenance of MONUSCO for the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017 in the amount of $1,275,288,800 has been submitted to the General Assembly for its consideration and approval during the second part of its resumed seventieth session. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of MONUSCO beyond 31 March 2016, the cost of maintaining MONUSCO would be limited to the amounts approved by the General Assembly for the 2016-2017 financial period.

VII. Observations

67. I would like to thank the Congolese authorities and people for their warm hospitality during my recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I was pleased to see for myself how much progress had been achieved since my first visit to the country over nine years ago. I was also encouraged by the tangible progress made towards strengthening the capacities of FARDC, in particular the commitment of the Government to address the issue of child recruitment, while progressing in the implementation of the FARDC sexual violence action plan, preparing for the re-insertion of thousands of demobilized ex-combatants and advancing police reforms. Those efforts are to be commended.

68. That progress notwithstanding, I am concerned about continuing political tensions and the impasse in the electoral process. I encourage all political actors to work together for a credible and inclusive process, in accordance with the Constitution. The holding of credible elections within the framework of the Constitution is crucially important to consolidate the progress made in the Democratic Republic of the Congo over the past decade. I urge Congolese political actors to spare no effort to ensure the holding of credible and timely elections and to preserve peace. Differences must be addressed through peaceful means. To that end, I encourage all Congolese political stakeholders to engage constructively in a meaningful political dialogue that places the national interest at the centre and urge them to extend their full cooperation to the Special Envoy of the African Union, Edem Kodjo. A constitutional crisis would undermine the significant political and economic gains achieved thus far, creating a serious risk of a slide back into conflict. I encourage regional and international partners to impress upon the Congolese stakeholders the need to preserve the collective efforts and investments made over the past years.

69. I am deeply concerned about the growing restrictions placed by the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on democratic space, particularly the targeting of members of the opposition, media and civil society. I call upon them to respect and protect the right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, as provided for in the country's Constitution. I urge all leaders to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric that incites violence.

70. An up-to-date and credible voters' registry is a political imperative and the foundation of a credible electoral process. All efforts must be made to ensure that electoral preparations proceed at an accelerated pace. Some, but not all, of the conditions necessary for the National Independent Electoral Commission to conduct a credible revision of the voters' registry exist. In that context the Commission has requested support from MONUSCO for the updating of the voters' registry. Such assistance could help the Commission to assume its primary role in the organization of the elections, enhance the credibility of the revision of the voters' registry, in accordance with the requirements of paragraph 20 of resolution 2211 (2015), and remove that obstacle to timely elections. I therefore recommend that the Security Council authorize the Mission to begin providing technical and logistical support to the Commission for the revision of the voters' registry. A number of risks must be managed in providing such assistance. A complete revision of the electoral registry may lead to a technical delay in the holding of elections beyond the constitutionally mandated timeframe. The revision process will need to be continuously assessed in order to minimize that risk. The Commission has agreed, in principle, to joint monitoring of the process with MONUSCO, UNDP and other key partners to ensure it is carried out as quickly as possible and in a credible manner. It will be important for key political actors to agree on the time frame for and extent of the revision of the voters' registry. I therefore call upon all stakeholders to redouble their efforts to reach a consensus on those questions as quickly as possible.

71. The situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is deeply concerning. I am appalled by the continued attacks on defenceless civilians in Beni, Lubero and Walikale territories in North Kivu and in Ituri. Armed groups continue to commit serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and have created extremely precarious conditions for displaced persons and local communities. The increasing fragmentation of armed groups not only poses a threat to civilians, but is also an obstacle to the neutralization of those groups. We must do more to protect civilians from the scourge of those armed groups.

72. There is no purely military solution to the problem of armed groups. Addressing the problem posed by those groups more effectively requires tailored approaches and a balanced combination of military and non-military actions. MONUSCO troops must be ready and willing to use force against those who pose a threat to the civilian population, and do so pre-emptively. Addressing the threat posed by those armed groups also requires MONUSCO to exercise its responsibilities effectively through improved performance of its military and police components. The conduct of targeted offensive operations to neutralize armed groups should remain the priority task of the force intervention brigade. However, urgent measures are required to ensure a more active contribution by the Framework brigades to the neutralization of armed groups and the protection of civilians. To achieve sustainable outcomes, the protection of civilians and the neutralization of armed groups should be approached as a Mission-wide responsibility, using military and non-military means, with the coordinated and active contribution of all elements

of the force, the police and the Mission's civilian components. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, the extension of State authority and efforts to disrupt the support base, networks and financing of armed groups, some of which are criminal in nature, are critical to the neutralization of armed groups and require additional focus.

73. The commitments made under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework remain relevant and their implementation is critical for sustainable peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region. The implementation of the Nairobi Declarations and the Framework is still fraught with challenges. I call upon all signatories to the Framework to honour their commitments under the Framework and to work together to ensure that the gains achieved thus far are sustained.

74. I welcome the positive momentum generated thus far in deepening the partnership between MONUSCO and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including the signing of the technical arrangement on 28 January to resume military cooperation against priority armed groups. Close cooperation between the Government and MONUSCO, combining military and non-military efforts, will render efforts to neutralize armed groups and protect civilians more effective. The strategic dialogue between MONUSCO and the Government remains an important forum for addressing issues of concern. I welcome the steps taken by the Government and the Mission towards the development of an exit strategy for MONUSCO and look forward to the swift completion of that process.

75. In my letter dated 16 December 2015 (S/2015/983), I proposed a further reduction of the MONUSCO force by 1,700 troops, while taking into account the increasingly complex situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the need for more effective mandate implementation in the coming months. That should be viewed as a concrete step towards facilitating the resumption of the strategic dialogue between the United Nations and the Government, with a view to achieving a common goal: the gradual and progressive exit of MONUSCO that preserves the gains and investment made thus far and averts a return to instability or conflict. The transformation of the force, if implemented fully and with the necessary resources, would ensure that the Mission continues to deliver effectively on its neutralization and protection mandates, responds quickly and robustly to threats throughout the eastern part of the country and covers conflict-affected areas, even as its static footprint is gradually reduced.

76. The presence of MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains essential, particularly with regard to its political role and other core functions. I therefore recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of MONUSCO, as established in resolution 2211 (2015), for a period of one year, until 31 March 2017.

77. In conclusion, I wish to extend my gratitude to my Special Representative for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Maman Sidikou, and to all staff members of MONUSCO and the specialized agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system for their continued hard work to restore lasting peace and stability in the country. I also wish to thank all troop- and police-contributing countries, the African Union, the European Union, bilateral partners and other international and regional stakeholders for their active engagement in support of peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

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Geospatial Information Section (formerly Cartographic Section)